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NOTE: Screen shots and information presented in this article are based on a pre-release version of Under a Killing Moon and are subject to change before final release. This article is not a review.

The words “interactive movie” have been thrown around by Silicon Valley developers and Hollywood gaming wanna-be’s for the last few years as the next revolution in computer gaming. But technological hurdles, thematic obstacles, and downright flimsy plots have given words like interactive movie and cinematic adventure a bad rap. While a few big-time Hollywood goliaths have rushed to market with their own versions of interactive cinemas, a handful of small and motivated publishers like Cyan, CyberFlix, and Presto Studios have shown the big boys how to dance in this highly competitive field.

Among them is a company called Access Software, known mainly for their prolific golf game, Links. A few years ago the company set out to create a unique and revolutionary graphic adventure called Under a Killing Moon. It took over 2 1/2 years to develop and was finally released about a year ago for the IBM-compatible platform. Development for a Mac version began shortly afterwards by Howard Shere (of Green Dragon Creations), whose previous works include Spectre and its (way too) many sequels.

The folks at Green Dragon began the port in March and are now putting the finishing touches on the game.

### [Isn't That Special](#)

So what’s so cool about Under a Killing Moon? Well, it’s not that it comes on 4 CD-ROMs, and it’s definitely not the storyline. It is, however, because of the ingenious interface and a host of technological innovations that make Under a Killing Moon so realistic and believable. The game combines painstakingly detailed 3-D environments, top-notch video sequences, a dynamic soundtrack, and complete freedom of movement.

The game is a series of who-dunits. As private dick Tex Murphy, you must solve them by traveling to different locations, interrogating witnesses, and utilizing objects you find during your investigation. Starting with an apparent simple burglary case, Murphy is soon drawn into a murder, a case of marital infidelity, the theft of a priceless piece of art, and eventually

a bizarre scheme that threatens the future of mankind.

The story is set in the year 2042 in San Francisco, where a group is intent on eliminating mutants from society. Murph's old boss, The Colonel, falls victim to the conspiracy, and Tex is left to follow the trail to the perpetrators.

In pursuit of the bad guys, Murphy leaves no cliché unused. Using atypical banter, Murphy satirizes the detective genre by using lame puns and humor throughout most of the discussions in the game. For example, when a beautiful girl offers to buy him a drink, Murph responds that he could really go for a giant slurpee. While many gamers and reviewers mistakenly saw this as bad acting, others took it for what it was, sleazy and slapstick humor. For example, while rummaging around in Tex's office you'll discover the \$10 Earth stamp, junk mail for "The Real You (Cosmetic) Surgical Clinic," a book by Rush Limbaugh III, and a picture of a fire extinguisher painted on the wall by the landlord to fool the one-eyed building inspector who has no depth perception.

Throughout the game you'll need to use flattery, flirting, threats, and even lies to get the information you seek. Experimenting with different responses in a situation will eventually lead you to a clue.

The game also features some Hollywood "where-have-you-been-lately" actors like Margot Kidder, Russel Means, and Brian Keith (of *Hardcastle & McCormick* fame). All in all, there are some 40 actors in the game. Interestingly enough, the main character (Tex Murphy) is played by Chris Jones, an Access game designer and vice president of Access Software. Although Jones won't get an Oscar for his performance, he shines through with his wit and humor. To top it off, James Earl Jones plays the voice of God. Nice touch!

### Graphics

While the humor helps lighten up the mood, *Under a Killing Moon's* obvious strength are in its graphics. Using a high-resolution 3-D graphics engine, the game presents an environment that is visually stunning. And unlike other 3-D games, the game allows you to move in any direction, including up and down AND the graphics don't break down in a pixelated blur when you get close to a wall or object. What all this means is that you'll easily be able to roam anywhere, touch anything, try everything. In addition to looking up and down, you can get down on all fours and crawl under furniture (looking for clues, of course!).

ied into the storyline are visual clips that serve to develop the storyline. Seamlessly incorporated into the 3-D backgrounds, the high quality video makes the actors look like they actually exist in the scenes instead of floating around like some displaced ghosts.

### [Movement](#)

Players use the mouse to navigate Tex through the three-dimensional world, picking up clues along the way. When you want to stop moving, a tap on the space bar provides access to typical adventure-style commands like get, drop, use, and so on. It does take a little getting used to, but over time it becomes intuitive. Making a mistake is never fatal. After a scolding from God (James Earl Jones), you are hoisted back to the beginning of the latest chapter.

The game operates in three modes, interactive, motion, and video. In video mode, you watch informational clips. In motion mode, the player moves Tex through the 3-D world with the mouse. And finally, in interactive mode, players question the actors in the game and “get” or “use” clues.

### [Intangibles](#)

The game features some other outstanding and innovative feature. A marvelous save feature allows several players to create multiple, annotated game positions, much like electronic bookmarks.

Also incorporated is a helpful hint system just in case you get stuck. But the more hints you use, the less game points you get.

### [Now the Bad News](#)

Under a Killing Moon is an extremely demanding game. Featuring high-resolution graphics, video, and 16-bit sound and music, the game demands RAM and horsepower. You'll need a high end 040 or better, and about 8 MB of RAM (although the designers say it play using 4 MB RAM). But at these low levels, the graphics will be chunky and a little slow. The more horsepower and RAM you have, the better the graphics will be.

### [To Die For](#)

If you're looking for a fast-action, action oriented adventure game like Full Throttle, then you'll be disappointed in UAKM. It is a slow-paced investigation/adventure game where you have to take your time. The beauty of the game lies in its puzzles, graphics, sound, and humor.

Under a Killing Moon sets a new standard for graphic adventures. In my mind, it finally puts an end to the search for the Interactive Movie.

### [Demo Installation](#)

A portion of the UAKM demo must be installed to your hard drive. Click on the button below

to install the demo. NOTE: The demo does have a minor audio problem with the introductory movie. It will be fixed in a future version of the demo.